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Emergence and Intensification

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*Dedicated to Adán Suazo Castelar, Ismael
Martinez Argueta, and the values and
traditions their generation represented and
defended.*

Preface



*Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.*

*Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.*

This excerpt is part of the seminal 1834 poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It describes the anxiety attached to remaining stranded in

the middle of an ocean whose waters serve no other purpose but to keep the poem's protagonists imprisoned in their ship.

A few years ago, the poem resurfaced in a rather unexpected setting. While documenting a protest in the New Zealand town of Dunedin in 2017, I noticed a poster designed by a local artist and activist that used some of the poem's lines. The poem was used to inspire tangential comparisons between its stranded ship and New Zealand's geographical isolation in the Pacific. Also, I could not help but notice that other more tacit parallels also existed, such as imagery from Māoridom like the *waka* (canoe). Above all, the poster used Coleridge's poem to describe a different kind of anxiety: one in which there is an abundance of water resources that cannot be widely enjoyed for their most fundamental use. The rally, led by Greenpeace activists, had been motivated by the intensification of water use for dairy farming in the Mackenzie River, located in the Canterbury region of New Zealand's South Island. I noted with great interest how protesters in Dunedin, a town located some 400 km south of the Mackenzie River, were willing to mobilize over environmental issues taking place elsewhere. But what seemed most noteworthy was the anxieties that drove them to protest that day.

So much of the work I had done at that point, and continue to do in the policy space today, is so eloquently represented by the above poster and by Coleridge's poem; there is water in abundance in a country like New Zealand, but anxieties over water insufficiencies and scarcities abound across the country. In New Zealand, the sense of despair felt by the mariners in Coleridge's poem can be similarly felt in the inland by several communities. The introduction of activities like water bottling has motivated significant fears for residents in New Zealand, in some cases triggering significant political mobilization. Similarly, intensive agriculture and suboptimal water infrastructure have been singled out as major sources of water contamination in several areas of the country, which have caused significant health concerns. Grievances of this nature should not be expressed in such a place of water abundance, but based on the use, manipulation and commercialization to which freshwater are subjected in New Zealand, and the myth of a water-abundant nation is constantly being challenged.

For a short period of time in the mid-1990s, and long before I would grow roots in New Zealand, my family relocated to the town of Valle de Angeles, Honduras, located some 30–40 min away from the country's capital: Tegucigalpa. Valle de Angeles, or Angels' Valley when translated in English, is a town of contrasts. While one of its main economic activities is tied to tourism, Valle de Angeles is also heavily dependent on the local trade of goods, most of which have been traditionally grown/produced in the area. Subsistence living for most of the inhabitants of this town is not a matter of choice: It is one of only a few economic enterprises in which residents can engage.

In recent years, Valle de Angeles has undergone major changes: Property value has increased drastically, highways have been built, and gas stations that were not in existence during my childhood have been installed. Some changes have arguably been conceived by the ingenuity of its people (in recent years, the town created a cooperative network of what they call 'moto-taxis', which provide an affordable and sustainable means of transportation for locals), but many others have emanated from without and with significant repercussions to local ways of life. Traditional clay

pots that were once produced in local factories through centuries-old methods are increasingly being replaced by pots with the now familiar and globally recognizable label 'Made in China'.

In 2012, I returned to Valle de Angeles for the first time in many years. A local farmer shared news that a series of multinational corporations had recently been conferred mining rights in the nearby area known as San Juancito, which is also the main source of freshwater for the surrounding communities, comprised of roughly 10,000 inhabitants. I was told that because of these enterprises, violence had begun to ensue in a number of areas now owned by foreign companies, and that local groups were beginning to mobilize in protest of exploitative activities they believed would harm their livelihoods.

Shortly before my family and I moved to New Zealand in 2016, news reached us that Honduran activist Berta Caceres had been assassinated by what we now know were paramilitary groups. Caceres grew up and lived in the town of La Esperanza, Intibucá, also my mother's hometown, and home to a significant population of Indigenous Lenca. Caceres' death hit particularly hard; she was one of the most prominent voices in the environmental and Indigenous movement in Central America, and during the months leading up to her assassination, she had been highly critical of the hydroelectric dam project 'Agua Zarca'. It is believed that her participation in movements against this project contributed to her murder. Following her death, numerous acts of violence have been reported near the project.

San Juancito and 'Agua Zarca' are not stand-alone cases limited to the Honduran context; they are microcosms of incidents that are happening globally, motivated by water access and uses that are inherently incompatible with communities' aspirations and interests. Communities in Bolivia have engaged in a series of riots in the city of Cochabamba over the privatization of the city's water services. Similarly, state-mandated water diversions along the Cauvery River in India have motivated intense violence.

Episodes of water-related asymmetries are also present in Global North contexts. Canada, my second adopted country, currently faces what several observers call a 'water crisis' that consistently and disproportionately affects First Nations communities. Like New Zealand, Canada is one of the top-most water-abundant countries in the world, yet adequate water access and use are not widely beneficial across all sectors of society. Water abundance, in this regard, is not synonymous with water enjoyment for all. In view of these asymmetries, questions arise in relation to how local communities and groups may respond.

New Zealand has indeed been immune to the forms of hydropolitical violence that have plagued other nations. This however does not mean that water-motivated conflicts within its borders are absent: They simply manifest differently, and often in ways we do not fully understand. Indeed, water bottling, wholesale water marketization, intensive agricultural development, and pre-emptive water treatment have motivated communities in several parts of New Zealand to mobilize to prevent the installation of enterprises they regard as actually or potentially deleterious.

Alongside these enterprises, significant water contamination events have taken place in New Zealand, which raise questions around the current state of water infrastructure and overall management. Such is the case of the 2016 Havelock North water incident, where the presence of E. Coli in the town's water supply led to an outbreak of gastroenteritis, contributing to an estimated 5000 residents becoming ill.

On the surface, New Zealand's water abundance is such that it should satisfy the nation's multisectoral demands, and those of the ecosystems it sustains. If that is indeed the case, then why are communities in New Zealand engaging in water-related conflicts? What types of water use motivate citizens to mobilize within a water-rich environment? Why are some communities in New Zealand exposed to suboptimal water quality?

This book is an attempt to explore some of these issues.

To develop an understanding of how and why water-based conflicts emerge in a country with the environmental, economic, social, and political characteristics of New Zealand, this book poses the following question: How and why does the commercialization of freshwater affect the emergence of hydropolitical conflicts in New Zealand? To answer this question, this book proposes two central arguments: First, that water commercialization practices influence the emergence of hydropolitical conflict intentionality if they are incompatible with the interests of local communities. This argument is an acknowledgment of the varying impacts that commercial enterprises exert upon both their immediate natural environment and on the communities that draw benefits from accessing and using the resources in that environment. Therefore, it is expected that some commercial operations will be more likely to influence the emergence of conflict dynamics than others. And second, this book argues that hydropolitical conflict risk intensifies in accordance with the extent to which residents trust the local approval and appeals processes that enable water commercialization practices. This argument seeks to examine the extent to which New Zealand's water authority system can effectively pre-empt or resolve local water-based conflicts. Despite an undoubtedly robust water management infrastructure, New Zealand residents continuously engage in intense water conflicts such as protests, marches, and different types of judicial challenges, all in response to perceived inadequacies within the purview of the water authority system. The rise of intense water conflicts puts into question the country's ability to adequately pre-empt and resolve said conflicts when they intensify. This argument attempts to explain this intensification.

To elaborate the arguments presented above, this book will be divided into 10 chapters. Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the literature exploring the nexus between resource abundance and conflict. This chapter concludes that for the most part, Abundance Theory has been developed through analytical examinations of abundant non-renewable resources and has not adequately examined the conflict-causing potential of other types of abundant resources, such as freshwater. It also argues that examining freshwater abundance requires a research approach that is sensitive to the different types of values that communities attach to freshwater, which may or may not be determined by economic considerations.

Chapter 2 builds on the elaboration presented in Chap. 1 and examines New Zealand's country-specific water dynamics in the context of what is referred here as the Coleridge Dilemma. This chapter explores the quantitative state of New Zealand's freshwater supplies and presents an overview of the country's water authority framework. It later presents a brief synopsis of the types of water-based conflicts that have emerged in New Zealand, as well as the types of water-driven enterprises that have motivated these frictions.

To examine the proposed research question, Chap. 3 lays out the research design through which the proposed arguments are examined. To test the conflict-causing potential of water commercialization, this book employs three methods of analysis to examine the effects of water bottling and water chlorination in the town of Ashburton and Glenorchy, located in the Canterbury and Otago regions, respectively. First, it applies a conflict intentionality and engagement analysis, where participants' perceptions over water bottling and water chlorination are assessed against their willingness to engage in conflict over those activities, and at what level of intensity. In this regard, perceptions are argued to be shaped in relation to participants' views over the economic, environmental, and social compatibilities of water bottling and water chlorination in their towns. Second, it employs a comparative analysis to identify common causal themes across the above cases. This analysis pays close attention to the variables that influence respondents' inclination to engage in intense hydropolitical conflicts. It also endeavors to capture any potential variations in the causal impact of water bottling and water chlorination across cases. And third, this study applies a conflict intentionality classification that categorizes actors in relation to the level and type of hydropolitical conflict in which they are willing to engage, or in which they became involved.

Chapters 4 and 5 feature individual analyses as they apply to the towns of Glenorchy and Ashburton, respectively. Chapter 6 then provides a tripartite analysis of the common threads identified in both cases. The chapter concludes that the data supports the arguments presented in Chap. 3, namely that the emergence of hydropolitical conflicts in Ashburton and Glenorchy is determined by the economic, environmental and social compatibilities of water bottling and water chlorination, and that the risk of conflict intensification is predicated by the trust that residents pose upon the approval process behind each operation. However conflict was likely to escalate in the face of an untrustworthy and incompatible water operation, as was the case with water bottling in Ashburton and with water chlorination in Glenorchy, conflicts over incompatible water activities were likely to be contained within the water authority system in each location, when residents trusted the activities' approval process.

Chapter 7 builds on the findings in Chap. 6 and provides a categorization of the conflict intentionalities identified in Ashburton and Glenorchy. It categorizes parties in relation to the level of intensity of their conflict intentionality and the motivations that drove them to said potential level of engagement. In addition to this, Chap. 7 also includes an analysis of all parties that reported no visible will to engage in conflict and who chose instead to engage in Collaborative, community-based actions. While these accounts constitute a small segment of the participants, they are presented in

this chapter as cases where enterprises such as water bottling and water chlorination (and in some cases, others) motivated residents to engage in positive interactions to alleviate their perceived negative impacts.

Chapter 8 explains the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study within the Abundance Theory literature, provides recommendations for future research, and describes policy intersections. This chapter stresses the need to conduct more qualitative research on the causal impacts of commercial practices such as dairy farming and to apply the study's framework in urban environments. It also calls for more research on the causal interplay between water commercialization and conflict in jurisdictions with higher concentrations of Indigenous people. Chapter 9 elaborates how a series of ongoing and proposed reforms could help address some of the issues highlighted in previous chapters. Lastly, Chap. 10 provides some final thoughts and elaborates this study's conclusions.

It must be noted that the great majority of the research, findings, and recommendations reflected in this book were written throughout a timeframe of six years. During this time, I held roles as an independent researcher and as a senior policy analyst in two government agencies. The reflections in this book are of a purely academic nature, and are in no way reflective of the New Zealand government's policy, nor do they represent the views and positions of any government department.

Lower Hutt, New Zealand

Adan E. Suazo

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Lastly, the accounts documented in this book do not belong to me; these are the histories and experiences of residents from Ashburton and Glenorchy. This book is my modest way of bringing their words back to them and to honor the time and trust they put in me throughout the data collection stages of the project.

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Adan E. Suazo